The Westminster Pulpit.

A SERMON
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VOL. 9. AUGUST 7TH, 1914. [COPYRIGHT.] NO. 32.

THE DAY OF WAR—THE DAY OF GOD.

Scripture Lesson: *Isaiah* xvii. 12-14; xxvi. 1-4, 20, 21; xxx. 15-18; xxxiii. 7-22.

"The Lord sat King at the Flood; yea, the
Lord sitteth King for ever.
The Lord will give strength unto His people;
The Lord will bless His people with peace."
—*Psalm* xxix. 10, 11.

IT goes without saying that to deliver a message in such an hour as this, is one of the most difficult tasks that has ever fallen to my lot in all the years of my public ministry. We are gathered together under the shadow, which is almost more than a shadow; the deep, dense darkness of approaching and almost inevitable calamity—the calamity of war. Let it be immediately understood that I am not here to say anything as to policy in this hour. I am here as an interpreter of the Word, and allow me to say the thing I feel, as a prophet of the Lord. We will attempt to look at the situation from the standard of Divine revelation, in order that those of us who bear the Name may be at least strengthened for whatever may be in store for us. The words of my text constitute the song which has been sounding in my soul through the last dark days. Will you, therefore, allow me by way of introduction to lead you in a very rapid survey of this wonderful Psalm, which culminates in these remarkable words.

It opens with a great appeal, which is at once of supreme importance, and absolutely inclusive:

"Give unto the Lord, O ye sons of the mighty,
Give unto the Lord glory and strength.
Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name;
Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

It proceeds to argue for obedience to that appeal, by celebrating the majesty and might of the Lord, and that in language full of poetic beauty and suggestiveness. Most evidently the place

which the singer occupied was that of a storm centre. In all probability—if this is indeed, as the title would suggest, a Psalm of David—he wrote it on some occasion when he found himself and his kingdom surrounded with peril, and threatened on every hand. Rising to the height of spiritual observation, he saw the greatness of God in His presidency over all tumult, and all commotion, and all storms. As the song proceeds, it describes the storm upon the sea, perchance the Mediterranean, sweeping away to the west from the place where the singer sang; then the storm breaking upon the mountains, perhaps those in the northern lands; and then the storm sweeping the wildernesses, perhaps those away to the east and south of the place where he sang. He sang of the sea:

> "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters;
> The God of glory thundereth,
> Even the Lord upon many waters.
> The voice of the Lord is powerful;
> The voice of the Lord is full of majesty."

Then of the storm upon the mountains:

> "The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars;
> Yea, the Lord breaketh in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.
> He maketh them also to skip like a calf;
> Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild-ox.
> The voice of the Lord cleaveth the flames of fire."

Then of the storm in the wilderness:

> "The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness;
> The Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.
> The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve,
> And strippeth the forests bare;
> And in His temple,"—including sea, and mountains,
> And plains—"everything saith, Glory."

That song was written in a high mood of the soul. Therefore, it culminates with the great words of confidence and assurance that constitute our text:

> "The Lord sat as King at the Flood;
> Yea, the Lord sitteth as King for ever.
> The Lord will give strength unto His people;
> The Lord will bless His people with peace."

In the text itself, I pray you note the singer's backward glance. He looked back to that which he found written in the records of his people, the history of the Flood. That was the supreme hour of desolation in human history up to that time; it was an hour when the world was so corrupt that there was no hope for it; and when the voice of the Lord declared, "I, behold I do bring the flood of waters." Then, said the singer, the Lord sat King at the Flood. Then, in the midst of the circumstances by which he was surrounded, he uttered the second strophe of this final word: "Yea, the Lord sitteth as King for ever." He is now reigning and ruling, not in spite of the storms, but the storms themselves are under His control! He will so sit for ever; there is no possibility of His dethronement, not the remotest chance of His defeat. Though cedars crash and fall, and forests are stripped bare, the desolations and devastations be every-

where, the Lord is King. It is the language of magnificent triumphant faith.

The singer's consequent assurance of soul was thus expressed: "The Lord will give strength unto His people," that is, through the processes of the storm; "The Lord will bless His people with peace," that is, the issue of the storm.

Now, in the atmosphere of that Song, let us consider the hour in which we are gathered together, in order that in a few brief sentences we may attempt to express our duty.

The week has been one of tumult. Brain and heart have been assaulted. Let us endeavour to think in the Sanctuary of our God, in the place of secret silences. There are three lines along which our thinking may proceed. We shall remind ourselves of the things that even now are uncertain; we shall endeavour to look honestly in the face some things that are patent; and all in order that finally we may speak of the things which are certain, if they are not patent.

The things which are uncertain. Uncertainty is still the note and the peril of the hour. I know nothing definitely; and yet I know enough as I stand here to say that the darkness this evening is more pronounced than it was this morning. We are all waiting for events, and we are conscious of the high tension thus created within our own souls. That high tension runs throughout the whole of our national life. That very note of uncertainty, and of consequent high tension, creates the possibility of fatal mistakes through fret and fever.

The elements of uncertainty have been many during the week. Many of them have passed away. Alas! not in the way in which we desired they might pass away. We were uncertain as to the action of some of the great Powers. We know more than we knew; and the new knowledge has not brought with it the sense of rest and peace. We, of the British Empire, are still uncertain, as to how far we are implicated at the hour. We take and accept from our responsible statesmen the distinct declaration that by actual agreement we are not implicated in this hour of coming calamity. But we are not absolutely clear—I am now attempting to speak, not for any section of the community, but out of the national conscience—we are not absolutely sure as to how far, by moral obligation, we are or may become, implicated. Our opinions may differ very widely as to whether or no we were morally bound to enter into this conflict yesterday; and those who hold the most strong opinions upon one change them. I want to say, and you will let me say it, that side may find it necessary to-morrow morning to modify and behind all I say to-night I have personal citizenship convictions, to which I am not going to give utterance in this pulpit. I am attempting to look at the situation in sympathy with those who may not be in agreement with me, and with whom I shall differ. To do so is to face the fact that, as a nation, we are in this hour in an atmosphere of terrible uncertainty.

But that which seems to me superlatively to need saying, in view of every possible contingency, is that there are certain things which are now quite patent, of which we need to be reminded. The first patent fact to which I refer is that of the

weird and devilish situation in which Europe finds itself at this hour; and the second is that of the tragic human situation.

I have spoken of the weird and devilish situation in which we find ourselves at the moment. Now hear me patiently through. I make you this affirmation: No one wants war. I affirm that of the whole of Europe. If there may be certain men who do desire war, simply for the sake of war, they are accursed of mankind, and are entirely out of count in all responsible considerations! If crowds anywhere are clamouring for war, let those crowds be examined, and find out who they are! Moreover, I shall appeal from the crowd, drunk with momentary infatuation and excitement, to the crowd sober, when it really thinks in the presence of the ghastly thing that war would be! Once again I affirm, allowing for these possible and ghastly exceptions, that no one wants war. We do not want war in England; not even those who hold that it is necessary, desire it. I do not believe for one single moment that Germany in its deepest heart desires war. I do not believe that Russia does, save perhaps as it may be somewhat careless about war in view of internal conditions, and may be inclined to choose what seems to be the lesser evil as between war and revolution. I do not know. What about Austria? Servia? France? Italy? For the moment be patient with me if I exclude the rulers, those who are in the places of authority; not kings and presidents alone, but their counsellors. What of the women and children in these nations? And, therefore, what of the men as men, who will march like dumb driven cattle to slaughter if war takes place? I affirm that the great human conscience of Europe is against war.

> "The wind comes seething through great forest trees,
> Followed by dread and awful silences
> Wherein we wait, and watch, and in our hearts
> Cry, 'From the storm, oh! God, deliver us!'
> Our country holds her sword upon her knees
> Silent, with eager eyes that watch her face,
> Our men stand: all on fire to fight; but we
> Women, close by their side, must fold our hands,
> Nor seek to see; because our eyes are blurred.
> And so we hear the stir of gathered hosts
> Followed by dread and awful silences,
> Wherein we wait, and watch, and in our hearts
> Cry, 'From the storm, oh! God, deliver us!'"

Let me put the thing I feel in another way. Suppose for a single moment that to-morrow morning the news were given to the world that there would be no war, think of the gladness that would sweep over every country, even those which for the moment seem to be clamouring for battle. Here is the devilishness of the situation. Some force, impalpable, spiritual, devilish, seems to be attempting to compel war, confusing the issues, paralysing our counsels, stirring our animosities. As the heavens look down upon Europe to-day, they see great nations mobilising, marching, preparing, for that which in their deepest heart they hate; preparing, like men in a dream, under the mastery of some giant evil spirit, from which they cannot escape. That is the devilishness of the situation.

Think then, of the tragedy of the human situation. For more than a generation the nations of Europe have been making preparations for war in the interest of peace. These have made Europe into an armed camp, so electric that the crack of an assassin's pistol threatens to engulf civilisation in chaos. Statesmen have been formulating policies which have attempted to secure safety, and these very policies now threaten to compel war. That is the whole meaning of the present situation. We have to render ourselves immune from war by alliances and ententes—and in the "we" of my reference I refer not to this nation alone, but to all the nations. As a result, in the moment of clash and of conflict, we have to march into line. The things we have done to produce peace are making for the most ghastly war in the history of the world.

Thirty years ago that great tribune of the people, John Bright, spoke of the Balance of Power as the foul idol of democracy. He was not far wrong. In the march of the decades we are proving it; whereas we have been worshipping before the altar of the Balance of Power, we have been creating the awful possibility of appalling things that seem to be upon us, and from which we cannot escape. There is abroad everywhere the sense of fate and futility. The compulsion of fear is upon us. The nations are at bay. The tragedy of the hour is more terrible than any language can describe.

What, then, else is there to say? There are some things in this hour which are certain if not patent. I go back now to my text, and I take the central affirmation of it. "The Lord sitteth King for ever." In that declaration the first note is not that of comfort, but that of illumination and instruction. As we are men and women of faith, we are compelled to believe that if the Lord sitteth as King for ever, He has been sitting as King through all these years that have led to his hour, over-ruling and governing. What, then, has He been doing, and what relation is there between the present catastrophic hour and this government of God?

I declare first of all that God has been compelling men to work out their own choices and decisions to logical issue. This is a perpetual method of God if we accept the Biblical revelation. Perhaps it will be safer and better for me, if I illustrate it rather from Hebrew history than from any other, though it might be illustrated in all human history. I look at one supreme revelation. There was an hour in the history of the theocracy of Israel, when Israel said, Make us a king like the nations. It was their choice, a deliberate choice; a choice that involved catastrophe. Do not be misled by any interpretation of the story that is not in harmony with the declaration of Scripture. It was a choice that involved the dethronement of God. I know—and this is only in a hurried aside—that to-day there are interpreters of this history that speak of the development of Israel, and say that Israel advanced in the hour when she came to be a monarchy. That is not the teaching of the Bible. The teaching of the Bible is distinct. In that hour when Israel sought a king like the nations, the Voice of the Lord said to the prophet: They have not rejected thee, O Samuel, they have rejected Me!

Now I pray you mark the Divine dealing with them. They had that for which they clamoured, which they chose. Saul, David, Solomon, the disrupting of the kingdom and the running of red ruin through the centuries, until the nation wrought out its own choices, to the ghastly, disastrous failure of the double captivity of the southern and northern kingdoms!

Or, take this great prophecy of Isaiah, from which I read excerpts to-night. God compelled the Hebrew politicians to work out their own choices. He said, Trust ye in the Lord. They said, No, we will trust in horses and Egypt. Then said He, To horses and Egypt shall ye go, and thus work out your own choices to their logical issue.

Perhaps we shall be most helped if we take one solitary, awful individual illustration from the clear light of the New Testament. Judas was a thief, and he had the bag. There was committed to him that which gave him the opportunity to work out all the black darkness of his own inner thought into visibility. There came an hour in the life of Judas when the Lord of Light said to him, What thou doest, do quickly! The thing long ago decided upon, work out into visibility!

The nations of Europe—when and where the movement began who shall say—decided to secure their individual safety by physical force. They decided that it would be well to make certain of the absence of war by federations on the ground of suspicion. The reigning God has compelled them to work out their own choices to their ultimate issue; and men who have looked upon war, and preparations for it, as characterised by pomp and pageantry, are probably to be brought within the next few months face to face with the ghastly reality. Nations that have based their friendships upon their suspicions of others, and have made treaties with these, in order that those may gain no advantage, are finding the hopelessness and the helplessness of their cleverness. God is compelling humanity to work out its own choices.

"The Lord sitteth King for ever," and there is another note in the revelation. He is compelling the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder He will surely restrain. Compelling the wrath of man to praise Him; first of all in the re-awakening of moral and spiritual sense resulting from such an hour of catastrophe. No! the turning of a nation to God in an hour like this is not the turning of men in fear and cowardice of soul. It is rather that in the presence of such a calamity, the spiritual life is awakened anew, and the moral sense is reborn. We preachers have been quoting for the last ten years, I think, those significant words of Professor James, of Harvard, in which—an enlightened man as he was, and hating war as he did—he nevertheless declared that what the age needs to save it, is the moral equivalent of war. That moral equivalent has never seemed to come, but war is coming, as it seems; not by Divine ordination, but as the result of human choices, human follies; and out of it are surely also coming those values that shall turn men back again to the deep things and the profound things.

Within our own country to-day, is there anything much more appalling than the flippancy with which we have been treating

life? Is there anything much more appalling this week, than that fact to which one of our daily papers dared to draw attention, that while great nations were upon the brink of awful catastrophe, Goodwood was crowded? We have been treating life flippantly. We have not had to face great issues as our fathers had, and we have drifted away. May we not hope that even the imminence of war has reminded us of the reality of things. He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him.

If the catastrophe shall really come, what then? Then, in the reconstructions which follow upon disaster and are made possible by it, we shall see the evidences of His goodness, in compelling humanity to be true—awful though the process be—to its own volitions; for thus it will prove the folly of choices made when He is forgotten; and thus it may turn back again to the way of His commandments.

Another certain thing is this: the Lord will give strength to His people. To those who confess Him and acknowledge Him, and bow to His Spirit, even in the day of calamity He will give strength. They will be the quiet souls who wait for Him, and the strong souls who work with Him. May we be among the number whatever the morrow may be bringing to us. So at last also we shall enter into that which is equally certain, that the Lord will bless His people with peace.

Now I will end my message on a personal note, for here I almost halt to speak of any other. I speak with you, rather than to you, as I address my soul and ask myself, What is my duty in this hour? I shall answer my own soul in public, as I have endeavoured to do in private, by the use of two words. My first duty is that of Courage; and my second is that of Co-operation with God.

Our first duty is that of courage. Courage is an affair of the heart. True courage is the heart instructed, fixed, steady. True courage is born of certainty, certainty of God whatever happens, whether peace or war. We must not allow ourselves for a single moment—whatever tragedy may be waiting for us, whatever darkness we may have to pass through—we must never allow ourselves to question the truth of the text, "The Lord sitteth King for ever." That is the secret of all courage.

Out of that sense of true courage in the hours that lie before us will be born the possibility of our co-operation with God. Co-operation with God! How can I co-operate with God when there are moments in which I cannot see the way God is going? We are at the end of the devilish heresy that God is on the side of the big battalions. We are not among the number of those who will take the newspapers, and count the armies as against the armies, and calculate. God is going to win. I do not know how! I do not know how!! I do not know whether this or that nation is to go down. I want to co-operate with Him, a lonely soul am I, only one; but all the race is made up of such as I am. How am I to co-operate with God to-morrow? By peace within my heart instead of panic! By persistent prayer instead of empty boasting of pride! So help me, God; so far as I am able, no word of boasting shall pass my lips concerning army, or armaments, or policies, for they are all chaff before the Lord God Almighty.

But I may pray still. I speak to comrades in the faith from far and near. It is not easy to pray to-day. Did you find it easy? Did you know what to ask for? No! but we must pray. What shall we pray? We must pray as we never prayed before, the thing we prayed this evening, the thing that Jesus taught us.

"Thy Name be hallowed.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done."

If the Church of God to-day, through the length and breadth of this and other lands, will but pray thus, even with a sense of her own ignorance, she will co-operate with God!

Paul to the Romans said, We know not what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit will make intercession for us with groaning that cannot be uttered. It is not the petitions that matter, it is the attitude of soul that goes out to God and prays, not for victory for our armies, but for victory for His way and His will.

When our praying is over, many of us have other things that we must do. There are some of you who are in the actual counsels of the nation to-day. My brothers, with profound respect for you, and sympathy with you in this hour, let me charge you that you are called to fulfil your Christian duty. You co-operate with God when you put principle before policy. When you realise, and those in authority realise, that the supreme thing is loyalty to eternal principles, and loyalty to the will of God, rather than policy, you co-operate with God.

Whether we as a nation are involved in actual war or not—God forbid that we should be, and yet it may be inevitable—whether we are or not, we have to face the fact, that difficult days are before us, days of discussions, days of deprivation, days of danger, possibly days of actual want. Let us endeavour who bear the Holy Name to live worthily of such as believe in God. Let our thinking be in truth, resolutely facing all the facts of the case; let our speech be without malice; and let our acting be without fear. Let us never forget that whatever suffering may come to us as a nation, such suffering in the economy of God is of the nature of chastisement, intended to restore us to favour and to life.

And so, still praying in the darkness that we may be delivered from war, we will go forward, for:

"The Lord sitteth as King at the Flood.
And the Lord sitteth as King for ever."

This Sermon was stenographically reported, and is printed without material alteration.

ONE PENNY.

THE BOOKSTALL, WESTMINSTER CHAPEL, BUCKINGHAM GATE, S.W.
LONDON: MORGAN & SCOTT, LTD., 12, PATERNOSTER BUILDINGS, E.C.

Printed by WIGHTMAN & Co., LTD., Regency Street, Westminster, S.W.
Published by MORGAN & SCOTT, LTD., 12, Paternoster Buildings, E.C.